

4323. a

R E M A R K S

O N

Mr. BRADFORD's

Antinomian

Reflections upon the Baptist Circular Letter,

Dated at Aulcester in June, 1786, &c.

[Price 4d.]



R E M A R K S

O N

Mr. B R A D F O R D ' s

Reflections upon the Baptist Circular Letter,

Dated at Aulcester in June, 1786;

S H E W I N G

His Misrepresentations, Defamation, Abuse of Scripture,
false Quotations, and unsound Doctrine.

By JOSHUA THOMAS. *R*

Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.

MORAL LAW.

Think not that I am come to destroy the law.

JESUS CHRIST.

We know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully.

—The law is made— for the lawless.

PAUL.

L O N D O N P R I N T E D :

AND SOLD BY J. BUCKLAND, PATER-NOSTER-ROW; T.
WILLS, STATIONER'S COURT; W. ASH, NO. 15,
LITTLE TOWER STREET; W. BUTTON,
NEWINGTON CAUSEY; AND J. WATTS,
TABERNACLE WALK, MOORFIELDS.

R. E. M. A. T. H. B.

MR. B. R. A. D. L. O. R. D.

Reception upon the 3rd of June 1875.

Given in the 7th year.



BY JOSHUA THOMAS

—————

—————

LOAN LIST

AT THE BRITISH MUSEUM, LONDON.
WITH A LIST OF THE LOANED ARTS.
BY JOSHUA THOMAS, ESQ.
LONDON: PRINTED BY J. JOHNSON, ST. PAUL'S CHURCH-YARD.
1875.

ADVERTISEMENT.

THE Circular Letter at Aulcester was dated early in June, 1786. Our next Affociation was at *Leominster*, in May, 1787. I had not then heard a word of Mr. Bradford's Publication. But not long after, some copies of his Letter were spread in our Town *gratis*, and some in Wales. I had the perusal of a copy, and was rather surprised to observe the Writer's temper so malevolent. Some weeks after, I drew up a few *Remarks* on his *Law of Faith*, by way of amusement, without any design to print. Some friends, who saw them, expressed a wish to have them published: but I let them lie dormant, having not written them with that view. In the Summer 1788, I went to London upon business; and found that

Mr. B. had spread some of his Letters there; and that reports were various, some wondering that the Letter was not answered; others boasting that it was unanswerable; and a third party wishing to see a reply to it; and so on. As several expressed a desire that I would suffer my Remarks to appear, I transcribed them, made some alterations in my former rough draft, and thus consented to the publication of them.

REMARKS,

REMARKS, &c.

IT appears by the *Circular Letter** at Aulceffer, that it happened to be my lot then to sign it, in behalf of others as well as of myself. That Letter, it seems, gave great offence to "John Bradford, A. B. late of Wadham College, Oxford—Chaplain to the Right Hon. the Countess of Huntingdon."——Out of respect to his honors, titles and connexions, he should have cooled a little, and not have written his *Law of Faith* in such a heat. I was not the writer of the Letter; but it appears plainly in the very front of it, that it was designed to oppose "the *libertine doctrine of AN-TINOMIANISM.*"

* It may be proper to inform some of our readers into whose hands this may fall, that the Baptists in several parts of this kingdom, as well as in America, form themselves into separate bodies, composed of several churches, as from their distances from each other may be most convenient; and that once a year the Ministers and Messengers of the several associated Churches meet together to give an account of the state of religion in their Societies, to advise with each other in any difficult matters, and to engage in the public worship of God.

At each annual Association a Letter is prepared by one of the Ministers, and read to the general body, and when approved, signed by the Moderator, and ordered to be printed and circulated amongst the Churches; the general design of which is to caution the followers of Christ against errors, and to stir them up to the practice of piety and universal holiness.

I had heard complaints of *Libertines* and *Ranters* in and near Birmingham, long before Mr. B. knew the place in his present connexion: and the Baptist Church there was so grieved with persons of some such dispositions, that their Letter to the Association in 1784 informed, that eleven of their members had been excluded, and the greatest part of them for *Antinomianism*. This will easily account for the following passage in the Aulcester Letter: "On this worst of all heresies (the libertine doctrine of Antinomianism) some of you, brethren, have repeatedly desired our thoughts in a Circular Letter." These things considered, who could ever have expected Mr. B. to advertise his reader, "that he found himself branded with the opprobrious name of Antinomian, as denying the Law to be a rule of life or conduct to a believer?"—Pray, how could he find himself in our Letter so branded? Not by his name, nor by any of his titles. In signing the Letter, I certainly had no thought of him: I knew the complaints about Birmingham long before. My name was readily set to confront the libertine doctrine, not thinking of any thing personal.

Not many months before the Aulcester Meeting, I had, in a friendly manner, invited Mr. B. to preach in my pulpit, as more convenient than the place he then intended to occupy for that purpose. He readily accepted my proposal. I and others attended. We thought his doctrine then sound and good. We had heard him once before, and knew nothing amiss in his doctrine or conduct, being a stranger passing through the town. Whatever happened after, I was under no temptation to think of him in assenting to the above Letter. If he found himself therein branded, it must have been by

by his name or character. His name is not in it; nor any thing else by which he can justify what he says. I am sorry that he has given room, to every reader of our Letter, and of his Advertisement, to assert that the charge is utterly false. But perhaps he may say, that he is branded as a *Libertine Antinomian*. Pray, are there no more Libertines than himself? Why must he feel above all others? But the fact is, Mr. B. hath branded himself evidently and publicly, though he thought proper to charge me and others with it. Let any indifferent person peruse his Letter, and see, if the general drift of it throughout, be not to deny absolutely the validity of the *moral law* as a rule of conduct now to a believer.

As he found himself so described in our Letter, he steps forth boldly, as thus confessing, "I am the man, the libertine Antinomian you oppose." As Mr. B. was educated at Wadham College, he must needs know the obvious meaning of Antinomian; and the Circular Letter explains what we mean by it thus: "Antinomianism is that doctrine which opposes the authority of the moral law, considered as a rule of conduct: and an *Antinomian* is one who denies that believers are under obligations to obey the moral law." Now in his performance he openly declares, and the second of his capital heads is to prove, "that a believer has no more to do with the law than a woman has to do with a former husband, who is dead and buried." Pages 18, 19. This is true, regarding justification, but not regarding conduct in life. It is rather extraordinary that Mr. B. should reckon the name *opprobrious*, and yet be so warm an advocate for the thing. He may

may have some secret reason for rejecting the name.

The Circular Letter, page 2, says, "In sentiment, some persons are Antinomians, who nevertheless, we hope, from the force of other principles, love, practise, and delight in holiness." Why could not Mr. B. see himself described here, and esteem it friendly and charitable? He says, p. 8, "If it be Antinomianism, to say, that God has no pleasure in wickedness, &c. in that case I am an Antinomian." Then pray, why cannot he likewise say, "If to deny resolutely, that the moral law is a rule of life and conduct to a believer, be Antinomianism; in such a case, I am an Antinomian." But leaving this, I proceed.

Page 9, he talks of giving an answer with *meekness* and *fear*. It is not easy to find any great degree of these in his Letter. He complains grievously of malicious reports, abominable falsehoods, acts of injustice and cruelty, listening to evil surmises, &c. and sticking at nothing to ruin his character. Does he charge the Elders and Messengers at Aulcester with all this? Are these to be found in the Circular Letter? But does not Mr. B. in his Letter attribute the whole to them? I, for myself, absolutely deny the charge, and challenge him, or any of his friends, to prove, that ever I spoke a disrespectful word of him, before I saw his Letter: but I have blamed his spirit and doctrine since, though not with malicious words. In his Letter, he casts fire-brands, arrows and death, without much meekness or fear, at me, and others, I suppose, as free of his charges as myself. But our comfort is, that the curse causeless shall not come.

As he disapproves of defamation so much, one might have expected him to be more sparing: but the

the most censorious are too often found very criminal. Now let us take a short view of the meekness, fear, and veracity of this modest writer. He complains of being *branded*, though neither named nor intended by me. He set his name and titles to his own Letter, where he brands himself sufficiently. Let any judge whether he spares branding and defaming the Messengers at Aulcester. What he says, in his Letter, we are to take to ourselves, let who may, if any, be guilty. There we are stiled, pretended friends, but the greatest enemies to him, and to the doctrines of free grace; though we profess otherwise. We are in effect charged with saying, that the greatest unbeliever is in the safest state, page 2. Does he know that any of the Messengers said any such thing? If not, why must he apply it to them? Why must they be denominated false Prophets, wolves in sheep's clothing, undermining the gospel, &c. ? pages 4, 5. But we have more of it still; Ministers of the devil, skilled like him in argument—uttering great swelling words—laying a paper of powdered arsenic upon the table, with an inscription, calling it powdered sugar-candy—Pharisees, who know as little of the power of divine grace, as they do of the treachery of their own hearts—pages 6, 7, 8. Still more, speaking of the Messengers, he says, “Surely they must have drunk deep of the golden cup, full of all abominations—these are the drunkards of Ephraim,” &c. page 11. Is not this branding to some purpose? He cannot suppose us *honest* in our distinction, but hold something resembling “the popish doctrine of “supererogation”—making a distinction only in pretence—pages 25, 26. and attempting to set up man's personal righteousness, to the effectual ex-

clusion

elusion of the righteousness of Christ, page 33.— This is part of the character given us by the meek Chaplain of the Right Honorable the Countess of Huntingdon. If we be so fond of sheep's clothing, he is even with us, and plays over again the old trick of dressing Christians in bear-skins, to expose them to the fury of the dogs.

Mr. B. remarks, that our Letter produces no scripture to prove the doctrine contained in it. To be sure, it is right to prove every religious doctrine by the word of God. But to cite many in our Letter would have swelled it beyond the bounds designed. Yet I would wish to know of Mr. B. which is best, to argue according to the divine word, without quoting chapter and verse; or to reason contrary to the word, and yet cite many texts; then misapply, pervert, and abuse them? The following may serve as a specimen of our Author's notable dexterity in applying scriptures to prove or elucidate his subject:

Page 8, he cites detached parts of Gal. iv. 14—17. to denote, perhaps, how some of the Baptists had received him; though, I suppose, not many of the Messengers at Aulcester: Yet some who had received him very cordially, saw reasons to cool in their affections; though not by his telling them the truth. If this citation can be of any service to him in the present debate, he is welcome to make the best of it.

The designed turn given by him to Mar. xvi. 16. in p. 17. as if that text did not mean water baptism, and that of believers only, is not at all to be wondered at, he is so used to such perversions. But the apostles, and other ministers then, understood our Lord's commission, as appears in Acts viii. 12. 36, &c. and xvi. 14. 31, &c.

Pages.

Pages 19, 20. we are referred to Heb. xii. to "find the nature, end, and issue of a law-work;" and are told, that "the *chastisement* there means "conviction:—as if those Hebrews were very young believers. Whatever may be said of their non-proficiency, from chap. v. 12, &c. and some other passages, it is evident that they were believers of long standing, and their character as such is given in chap. vi. 9, 10. and x. 32, &c. They were come to mount Zion, so were not under the fiery law of mount Sinai, chap. xii. 18, &c. It is very evident, that the apostle in that chapter is comforting believers under long persecutions and many troubles. But by Mr. B.'s rule in applying scripture here, every believer that hath *need of patience* is but under a law-work, and under conviction. If Heb. xii. refers to a law-work, then the law must be of some service to a believer.

But of the several scriptures abused and perverted, I am now most of all struck with his gloss in p. 30, 31. upon Jam. ii. 17, &c. in which the apostle's design evidently is, to prove, "that faith without works is dead"—ver. 20. 26. But we are told, that the work there spoken of, "can mean "nothing else but the work or act of faith." Pray, is not the act of faith, faith itself? Then the apostle must reason thus: "So faith, if it hath not faith, is "dead, being alone." But perhaps Mr. B. will say, Not so; but the mere profession of faith, without the reality of faith, is dead, being alone."—Then it "will run thus: "Thou hast faith in profession, and "I have faith in reality: shew me thy faith in profession, without thy faith in reality; and I will "shew thee my faith in profession, by the inward "act of my faith." This way of torturing the word of God is really shocking; I am really grieved at it.

Let

Let us a little consider the subject. Ver. 21. says, that Abraham's work was offering his son Isaac. Ver. 22. says, that faith *wrought* with his *works*. Here is plainly the inward exercise of faith with his outward work. Yet Mr. B. says, his work was his *act of faith*, not *his personal obedience*. How awful this! when Jehovah himself saith, "Because thou hast *done* this thing—because thou hast *obeyed* my voice." Gen. xxii. 16. 18. And in Heb. xi. 17, &c. this notable deed of the patriarch is celebrated. Yet says our Author, Not by his personal obedience to the moral law, for his work was contrary to that law: though God says, "Because thou hast obeyed my voice." Was there ever a more personal obedience? But the dexterity of this writer will set the express command of God at variance with the moral law. We need not wonder at his attempt to set the Aulcester Messengers at variance with themselves, and with the truth.

Let us proceed, and see how Rahab is treated. Her work, referred to by the apostle, was "receiving the messengers, and sending them out another way," Heb. xi. 31. The inspired apostle names her among the elders who obtained a good report by faith, and mentions the same work of receiving the spies. But our daring writer says, "The works, by which she is said to be justified, were contrary to the moral law, betraying her country and telling lies." I wish the Tutors in Wadham College, Oxford, had taught their pupil to use the word of God with better manners, and less wantonness. He hath taken up the language, the profane language of our bold Free-thinkers, who fear not God, nor regard his word. Thus have we the works of Abraham and Rahab boldly arraigned as profane, though so much celebrated by two in-
spired

pired New Testament writers. But unhappily for Mr. B. he acknowledges that they were justified by their secret acts of faith, when the very conduct of both, according to him, was contrary to the moral law, and even profane. Thus he becomes an advocate for the very dregs of Antinomianism. But I would hope it is inadvertently, and not in principle and design. By this view of things, one might conclude, that persons may be guilty of murder, lying, treachery, or any other immorality; yet be justified by their secret act of faith at the same time, though not by their immorality. This naturally reminds me of the paper of powdered arsenic, represented as powdered sugar-candy. But we have in Mr. B.'s Letter a number of scriptures to prove and illustrate all this.

One perverted text more, and I proceed. In p. 31. he cites 2 Cor. xiii. 5. The text says, "Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, &c." It is thus cited, "Know ye not even of yourselves, that Jesus Christ, &c." I shall leave the reader to judge, whether this appears fair or no.—There are several other scriptures very impertinently cited; but these shall at present suffice. It is rather following his example too much, to say, as he does, that the devil quotes scriptures to serve his turn; and perhaps more skilfully than some writers. He is an old serpent.

Though Mr. B. cited so many scriptures, there is not one among them all that amounts to a proof, that "the moral law is not a rule of conduct to a believer;" which was the very point he undertook to prove. I do not blame him for not producing *one* text to evidence his assertion; for he could not find it. But unwary readers may suppose, that

B among

among so many quotations, some of them must be in point.

I have some objections to Mr. B.'s manner of citing from our Letter. It is easy to do that unfairly. It will soon appear how fairly, or unfairly, he acquitted himself in that respect.

In page 11. we have this quotation: "To cite passages of scripture to prove *assertions* (say they) is to upbraid their readers with egregious ignorance of the New Testament." The original paragraph in the Letter runs thus: "Another argument, by which the authority of the law is established, is this; all the duties enjoined by the moral law, are enforced on believers in the gospel, by the most cogent motives. To cite passages of scripture to prove *this* assertion, would be to upbraid you with the most egregious ignorance of the New Testament, or, what is worse, the diabolical skill of perverting that blessed volume."

It is well known, that by citing detached scraps, any author may be made to speak what he never meant. The reader is left to judge, whether we have been fairly represented by Mr. B. in his citations. In the above passage our Letter says, "This assertion," in particular. The citation saith, "Assertions," indefinitely: which not only makes it false, and perverts the sense, but makes it *nonsense*. As it lies in the Letter, the paragraph is very defensible; yet there are many assertions that *should* not be proved by scripture, many that *cannot* be proved thereby, and many are so plain that no scripture *need* be cited to prove them. We should all beware of the hint in the close of the last citation above. Mr. B. was put in a fret by some others, and was determined to load us with his vengeance.

In the same page we have the following citation:
" By

“ By our own righteousness we personally honor
 “ our Maker; we experience the exalted pleasures
 “ found in the practice of holiness; we enjoy com-
 “ munion with God, the testimony of a good con-
 “ science, and a delightful sense of the approbation
 “ of Jehovah.”

In our Letter, page 8. this paragraph begins thus :
 “ These were some of the ends which *were* to be
 “ answered by our obedience to the moral law, as
 “ the law of our creation, and a perfect rule of
 “ conduct. By our own righteousness we *were* per-
 “ sonally to honor our Maker; to experience the
 “ exalted pleasures which are to be found in the prac-
 “ tice of holiness; enjoy communion with God,”
 &c. This citation is not only wrong, but it perverts
 and entirely turns the sense of the Letter. That
 expressly mentions the ends to be answered by
 our obedience to the law, as the law of our *creation*,
 and that before the Fall; and accordingly it says,
 “ *We were* personally to honor our Maker.” But the
 citation says, “ We personally honor, &c.” that is,
 we *now* do it by our own righteousness; *were* is
 left out wholly, and *to*, before *experience*, which words
 denoted in their connection the time past, even
 before sin entered. But Mr. B. makes the whole
 to speak of the present time. And to carry on the
 imposition, where the Letter says, “ *to experience*,”
 the citation says, “ *We experience*,” and adds,
 “ *We enjoy*, &c.” Thus the whole period, which
 in the Letter refers to the time before the Fall, is
 now represented as referring to our present time.
 Such are the honesty and integrity of the good
 Lady’s Chaplain! When he had fabricated the
 period to his own purpose, he exclaims hideously,
 laying; “ May the Lord ever keep me faithful to
 “ oppose such blasphemous sentiments as these, and

“detect such damnable heresies!” This is the practice and language of our bold Oxonian.

This paragraph, so perverted and misrepresented, I understood thus when I signed the Letter. The two or three first lines of it are artfully omitted in the citation. But let the whole go together fairly, then it appears to me as denoting some of the designs in giving the law before the Fall. So it is plainly expressed, we *were* to do so and so; that is, our first parents were to do so, in obedience to the moral law, as the law of creation; or mankind were to do so. But the perverse citation says, “*We* honor—*We* experience, &c.” denoting that we now do it, when our Letter says no such thing.—But perhaps Mr. B. may plead, that the Queries cited in p. 12. do plainly imply the present time. To this it may be replied, That the paragraph evidently refers to the past time till it come to the Queries; but in them it refers to the present time, and I understand them thus. 1. “Do we by the righteousness of Christ personally honor God?” that is, Can a believer honor God, by the righteousness of Christ, when he pays no regard to the moral law as a rule of conduct?—2. “Do we, by that righteousness, experience the exalted pleasures which are only to be found in the practice of holiness?” that is, Can a person without holiness experience joy and peace in believing? Possibly Mr. B. entertains but a low opinion of holiness; but I am now giving my own opinion of the passage.—3. “Doth the righteousness of the Redeemer capacitate for communion with God?” In other words, Is the man who despises the moral law, as a rule of conduct, capacitated by the righteousness of Christ for communion with God?—4. “Is it by that we enjoy the testimony of a good conscience,”

"science, and a delightful sense of the approbation
 "of Jehovah?" that is, Can a person who disre-
 gards every command in the Bible, have the testi-
 mony of a good conscience, and a delightful sense
 of his pleasing God through the righteousness of
 Christ?—The sense of the whole paragraph seems
 to me to be no more than this, That the righteouf-
 ness of Christ, imputed to believers for justification,
 was never intended to exempt them from fearing
 God, or keeping the commandment of a blessed
 Redeemer, out of love to him. I hope Mr. B. is
 nearly of the same opinion, though he somehow
 misunderstood this paragraph; but I do not see that
 it contains either a blasphemous sentiment, or a
 damnable heresy.

Our Letter, p. 4. says, "We allow, that obliga-
 "tion to obey the moral law supposes a *capacity* of
 "being *governed* by a law. This capacity man has,
 "being a rational creature, and a free agent." Now
 see how our fair Author cites, page 13. "It is ad-
 "mitted in the Baptist Letter, that it would be ab-
 "surd to say, that the law was a rule, if man had
 "not a capacity of keeping it. They say, man has
 "this capacity." Let any impartial person read
 our Letter with care, and see whether it will justify
 such a quotation as this. The original says, that
 man has a capacity of being *governed* by a law. The
 citation charges the Letter with saying, that man
 has a capacity of *keeping* it. Having framed the pas-
 sage thus to his hand, he proceeds magisterially to
 confute it. If he had happened to mistake once or
 twice, one might rather wonder that he did not see
 his error at last. But it seems he was determined to
 represent our Letter as saying any thing to suit his
 turn, then father the whole upon us. The Letter
 does mention capacity or ability to be *governed* by a
 B 3 law,

law, six or seven times; but never *once*, a *capacity* or *ability* in fallen man to *keep* the moral law: Yet our Author hath the assurance to charge us about fourteen times with saying, that man now has a capacity or ability to keep the moral law, and fulfil it. This is the person that boasts so much of his gospel liberty. I wish he may be more watchful in future. But he says, page 9. "I rest assured, that God will not suffer his own truths to be materially injured by the weakness of his poor servant."—I hope so too.

I now proceed to take a little notice how Mr. B. confutes what he calls our doctrine. There we shall find more of his integrity.

When I heard the Letter read, before I signed it, it was considered and understood by me, as designedly pointing at the *Libertine Antinomian* doctrine, as it is mentioned in the front of it. It is well known, that different persons have a different way of expressing themselves on the same subject, though in the general they agree in sentiment. Their style likewise often differs. Neither do readers always see and form ideas alike. Mr. B. and I happened to have apprehensions very wide of each other in reading the Circular Letter. He thought proper to give his opinion to the public: some of my thoughts are now given, and I have a few more to follow.

The moral law is defined in our Letter, p. 2. as consisting of "all the preceptive part of the Decalogue, or ten commandments, with every thing else of the same nature, that is discoverable by reason, or revealed in scripture." This includes every divine command in the Bible, or any thing of the same nature that may be justly deduced from it.

Respecting

Respecting Mr. B.'s Introduction, I shall add very little to the hints already given. The spirit that runs through it gives notice of what is coming. I readily agree with him to rest the whole upon the word of God. He advises his readers to read and judge for themselves. I have done so. I take the whole from his own pen. Where he so defames the Aulcester Messengers, and trumpets forth his own applause, let him make the best of that. Readers may easily understand him.

He opposes strenuously, "that particular term" or phrase, *The law a rule of life or conduct to a believer,*" p. 10. This he esteems a pernicious position, entirely subversive of the gospel. The moral law, as above defined, includes every word of God, that is of a preceptive nature; even advice, direction, warning, &c. and all in the preceptive form, such as believe, obey, repent, &c. Mr. B. proposes this phrase; "The scriptures are the rule of faith and practice;" then adds, "Surely this is as extensive in its meaning as to say, that the law is a rule of life:" p. 26. We do not object to this phrase, but we think it fully implied in ours. But we are told that our phrase "implies, that the believer is under the curse," though we believe no such implication. We shall see how that is by and by. Mr. B. seems to be highly displeased with the written law of ten commandments, as unworthy of a believer's notice, and as if it were contrary to the law of the Spirit. p. 27. Our Lord sums up the whole law in two commandments, love to God, and love to man, Matt. xxii. 36—40: so love is the fulfilling of the law, says Rom. xiii. 10. Can Mr. B. bear it in this form? He says, p. 33, "There is a desire and disposition in the mind of every true be-
" liever

“liever, arising from a sense of God’s love, and
 “maintained by God’s Spirit, to live in confor-
 “mity to the divine will, &c.” Very well: This
 is the law put into their mind, and written in their
 hearts, according to Heb. viii. 10. Conformity
 to the divine will is obedience to the divine moral
 law, or to the word of God. This is all for which
 we plead.

But we are told, page 17, that, “the greatest
 “confusion arises from not clearly distinguishing
 “between obedience to the moral law, and obe-
 “dience to the gospel.” It is observable, that the
 two phrases above, both ours and his, mention
 the *scripture*; which includes both law and gospel.
 The moral law, in ours, includes every thing of a
 preceptive nature, be it called law or gospel. In
 p. 25. it is allowed, that a distinction is “made
 “between the law as a covenant, and the law as a
 “rule; and, that it has been adopted by some able
 “writers; who, Mr. B. believes, were *honest* in
 “their distinction.” Our Letter says, p. 6, “That
 “believers are delivered from the law, considered
 “as a covenant of life, is a glorious truth, which
 “we readily allow, and in which we greatly re-
 “joice.—But we affirm they are still under it, as
 “a rule of conduct.” But this suspicious Chaplain
 cannot suppose that we are *honest* in our distinc-
 tion, because, “in another place, the believer is
 “said to be under the law in its covenant form,
 “inasmuch as it offers rewards according to obe-
 “dience.” Pray, who says so? Not our Letter.
 But Mr. B. thinks proper to infer that, and assert
 it. Then he does, in his way, cite a passage out
 of p. 5. of our Letter, which runs in the original
 thus: “Let us now take some notice of the nature
 “of those rewards which the law proposes. By
 “the

“ the rewards of the law we mean, that happiness which is to be obtained either *in* obedience to its authority, or *in consequence* of obedience.” I did not understand this at all in a covenant form to fallen man; for the Letter in the same page says, “ As a rule of conduct, it is the law of our creation. As a covenant of life, it *was* a gracious constitution, according to which God promised to bestow eternal life on him who should perfectly obey it.” If Mr. B. cannot suppose our distinction honest here, I hope another easily can. This covenant form refers in this place to the time before the Fall. It is above observed, that what the Letter mentions of the state of innocency, he makes it to speak of the present time. It would have been but honest in him to have made a distinction between the present and the past time.

In p. 26. Mr. B. insinuates that *rewards* necessarily suppose a covenant of works. Does he suppose that covenant to be meant Psal. xix. where law, statutes, &c. are mentioned, and in ver. 11. which says, “ In keeping them there is great reward?” Our Author in that page says, with a sneering air, “ Is not here great encouragement to work?” — Undoubtedly; the believer has great encouragement to work, and is assured that his labor is not in vain in the Lord. Must all works bring the believer under the law in its covenant form? Are there any gospel works? Who have more encouragement to work, from a right motive, according to the divine rule, to a proper end, than believers? Does the reward make the whole a covenant of works? I am sorry that a person of his pretensions can write at this rate. 1 Cor. iii. 8. says, “ Every man shall receive his
“ QWR

"own reward, according to his own labor." And ver. 14. "If any man's work abide—he shall receive a reward." Ver. 15. "If any man's work shall be burnt, he shall suffer loss."—Is not here great encouragement to work? The rewards of believers are mentioned through the Bible, from Genesis to the Revelation. Strange, if all this brings true believers under the law in its covenant form! See Prov. xiii. 13.

Mr. B. is not likely to be overloaded with works of supererogation. He does not seem well to understand them; or else he talks rather in a judicious manner about them. In the same p. 26. he cites from the Letter, the sovereign reward "which the divine Being promises to bestow on the obedient, of his sovereign good will and pleasure." He says, this "looks like over wages." So he compares the divine promises of sovereign good will, to the popish doctrine of supererogation. I am ashamed to say any more upon this. Let him glory in it. Let us proceed to some other parts of our Letter, against which he makes exceptions.

In page 11. "Rationality, free agency, free will, and man's capacity to obey the law," are exhibited as terrible bugbears; and p. 6. saith, the little horn in Daniel and the Revelation, "had a mouth speaking great things." But let us try these, and begin with

Rationality. Our Letter, p. 4. says, that man, "being a *rational* creature, has a capacity of being governed by a law." This I believe. Who can have the face to deny it? Need we scripture to prove it? It is easy to produce plenty. "Come, let us reason together, saith the Lord." Is. i. 18. Were I to say, that "to cite passages of scripture
" to

“to prove that man is a *rational creature*, would “be to upbraid the reader, &c.” probably some unhappy turn or other would be given to it. But I will now hazard that. Law and gospel, the whole scripture, and all the tolerably human laws in the world, shew that man is capable of being governed by a law. Our Letter says, by *a* law indefinitely, that is, by any law, then by the moral law, which is the best, being perfect. I know Mr. B. does not allow the law to be perfect, p. 23, where he produces what is said of the typical law, to prove the imperfection of the moral law: such kind of proofs appear in other places. Page 14, he says, “As condemned criminals, we “are bound to suffer the punishment which the “law requires.” If man has not rationality, nor capacity to be governed by the law, how can the law condemn him? And can any say, that it is not reasonable for the believer to take the whole word of God, as the rule of his conduct, when Jesus saith, “If ye love me, keep my commandments?” Is not that reasonable service? Rom. xii. 1. John xiv. 15.

Free agency is the next article of ridicule. The Letter, p. 4, says, “If man were not a free agent, “but acted from invincible foreign agency, against “his will, certainly there would be neither sin nor “holiness in his actions.”—This is by Mr. B. transcribed very emphatically, in Italics and capitals, as very obnoxious; probably, to shew how inconsistent this is with personal election, &c. For in p. 10. he says, “To me it seems impossible “to reconcile man’s free agency with eternal and “personal election, and particular redemption.”—If, to him, it seems impossible, I cannot help that: to me it seems not only possible, but very easy.

easy. So different are the ideas of readers! He gives no reasons why they do not seem to him reconcilable, or consistent. I might follow his example and go on, as he did: yet I think it fair to inform the reader what I mean by *free agency*. I do not intend by it, the wild rant we have in our Author's introduction, p. 6, as if we pretended to a power of ourselves, independent of God, to fulfil the law, or do any thing we thought proper. Such a free agency as that would soon prompt us to cast off the law wholly, and say like Mr. B. "We need not the written law of ten commandments to regulate our conduct." Nor do I mean by it, that man, in his corrupt state, has a free disposition to that which is evangelically good; nor that even the regenerate man is free from many obstructions to perform what he is disposed to do. When I say, that man is a free agent, I mean that he naturally acts freely, and that he always has power so to do, while he has the proper exercise of his reasoning faculties. See a scripture instance in Acts v. 4. Says Peter to Ananias, "Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power?" Here Ananias was a free agent, at full liberty, either to sell the land or not; and when he sold it, he was at equal liberty to give all the price, or part, or none of it, to the common stock. But poor Ananias could not manage that private act of faith, while he spoke those untruths, so as to be justified at the same time, as our Author says Rahab was, while her works were, "betraying her country and telling lies."

Take another instance: Some months before the meeting at Aulcester, Mr. B. came to Leominster, as before observed, and talked of preaching

ing in the street, late in the evening. I told him, it would be rather improper for him to preach there in the dark; and proposed my pulpit to him. I left him to his own liberty; so he was then a free agent, and he prudently chose the pulpit. Again he used his free agency, and never came to it any more. He was at that time welcome to it; and we are not displeased with him now for not coming. In that sense we are all free agents. The ungodly act freely in the way to ruin: but in the day of God's regenerating power, the sinner is brought to forsake freely his former ways, and as freely to chuse the way of life. If Mr. B. does not understand these things, and see it easy to reconcile them with eternal and personal election, and particular redemption, &c. I am sorry for him, and wish him more light, though he boasts of so much. But if he understand the subject, and talk as he does, he is the more criminal.

Free will is the next article at which he sneers. —When I assure the reader, that the phrase *free will* is not in our Letter, what can justify Mr. B. for fathering this brat of his own upon us? Probably he thought it would much help to expose us. But I think that his asserting, as one of our grounds, that which is not in the Letter, should expose him. It seems, he concluded that a *free agent* must have *free will*. I am under no obligation to say much upon this article. As he thought proper to lug it in, he should take it out again, or let him make his advantage of it.

His fourth article is *man's capacity to obey the law*. This is a capital article in Mr. B.'s book. He harps much upon this string, it is so musical to him. It was unhappy enough for him, that
 C this

this was not to be found in our Letter; but he was obliged to procure it, and make much use of it in his Tract. When this is done, he says, "To me it seems impossible to reconcile man's capacity to obey and keep the law with original sin." As that impossibility is of his own framing, let him manage it as well as he can. It seems Mr. B. read our Letter in a very careless manner, when he could say, "It is positively and expressly affirmed in the Baptist Letter, that man has a capacity of being governed by, *and obeying* the law." p. 10. I positively and expressly deny this. Yet in p. 16. he says, "It must certainly discover the grossest ignorance of the nature, end, extent, and spirituality of the law, to affirm, that any of the fallen sons and daughters of Adam (except the *God-man*) could possibly fulfil the law. To affirm this, is truly Antinomianism: for who is against the law, so much as he who affirms, that fallen man can personally keep it, yea fulfil it?" One might expect, from all this, and much more of the same kind, that our Letter abounds with this *capacity* and *ability* to *keep, obey, and fulfil* the moral law. But is it not amazing and shocking, that any man can write at this rate? and much more so, that any person professing Christianity, and in the ministry of the gospel, talking of what he does, can do so; when our Letter does not so much as once mention capacity in fallen man to keep, obey, and fulfil the law; but only and constantly of being governed by a law? See more of this above. But capacity of being governed by a law, is not so much as once mentioned among what he calls "grounds upon which the law is to be established as a rule," p. 11. Perhaps there never were so many gross falsehoods repeated

repeated in so small a performance by a Gospel Minister before. I wish him conviction, repentance, and pardon. He acts sufficiently against the moral law. In his 11th page he talks freely of the erroneous drunkards of Ephraim. One would think he himself was rather giddy when he wrote the passage last cited; in which he says, "To affirm that any of the *fallen* sons and daughters of Adam (except the God-man) could possibly fulfil the law." I appeal to the reader, whether the parenthesis does not represent Emmanuel as one of the *fallen* sons of Adam. I make no remark upon it, as I believe it was inadvertency: nor is this the only one in the Book, though this does not appear to me a very small one.

I proceed to another instance of the fair dealings of our generous antagonist. Pages 2, 3, our Letter mentions "the immoveable basis on which the authority of the law is built;" which consists of these articles, "The glorious character of the blessed God,—The intimate relation in which men stand to him,—The great and innumerable benefits they have received from his munificence,—Their capacity of being governed by a law,—And the nature of the moral law." Then these articles are briefly explained. But Mr. B. in p. 11. as noted already, says, "These are the grounds upon which the law is to be established as a rule; rationality, free agency, free will, and man's capacity to obey the law."—Now what our Letter calls a *basis*, consists of five articles. Mr. B.'s Letter does not meddle with one of them; so the fabrick must stand, for any thing he has done to it. But he mentions four new articles, which he calls *grounds*. The two former of them are mentioned in our Letter, but not as a basis, nor as grounds. Though he fabricated

them for us, he does not attempt to confute them, either by scripture or by reason. His two last articles are not in our Letter at all, but are entirely his own. I now proceed to the objections stated to the phrase, "The law a rule of life, or conduct, to a believer," p. 12.

The first depends on our saying and affirming, that fallen man has a capacity of fulfilling or keeping the law. That is absolutely denied already. Let him prove that, if he can. We do not ask in the Letter, why the law was given, if man could not keep it? as he says, p. 13. but I ask now, Why mount Sinai is fixed upon, as the place and time where the law was given, as in page 14. and not Paradise, as in p. 14, 15. where, and when Mr. B. readily admits, that "man had power to keep the law and a capacity "to be governed by it?" Our Letter mentions the law of creation. He says, page 15. "Now, as transgressors, all are equally concluded under sin." To this we agree. In the same page he says, "It is certain, that the law given upon mount Sinai was in substance the same as that given to Adam in the garden." That is readily admitted. The distinction now between the law as a covenant, and the same law as a rule, has been spoken to already. He says, "To say that the believer is under the law, is unscriptural." Was not he a believer who said, "Being not without law to God, but *under the law* to Christ?" 1 Cor. ix. 21. Did not the apostle delight in the law, and *serve* it? Rom. vii. 22. 25. But he will not admit the distinction, he says, "for the reason given in our Letter." The reason recited by him, p. 16. is his own invention, and not to be found in our Letter. Had it not been for his own interpolations, this writer might have spared his labour. To all he hath said, in six pages,

to prove, "that the law was not given upon supposition that man could keep it;" I reply, that the law of creation, mentioned in our Letter, was given in the garden, upon certain knowledge that man could keep it, before the Fall. This is admitted by Mr. B. himself: so his labour here is wholly beside the subject.

His second objection to our assertion, "that the law is a rule of life or conduct to a believer," is, "That the believer is absolutely and entirely delivered from the law," p. 18. It is repeatedly acknowledged, that he is so delivered from the law as a covenant of works, or life; and therefore from the condemnation denounced by it. As a covenant of works, and in reference to justification, he is dead to the law, agreeable to what our author says. In the same page, he quotes the following passage: "Where there is no law, there is no transgression." Then he says, "Now Christ, in his flesh, abolished the law." What law is so abolished? The ceremonial or typical law of sacrifices, &c. "the end being answered for which it was given." The curse of the moral law is abolished, as to every true believer in Christ. To say that the moral law is abolished, is unscriptural with a witness. The consequence of this position is, That the believer now has no rule of conduct, of worship, &c.: consequently he is guilty of no sin at all, while a believer. Is not this libertine *Antinomianism*? Where there is no law, there is no transgression; for sin is not imputed when there is no law. Rom. iv. 15. and v. 13.—It seems, that it is low indeed, "To say, that the believer needs the written law of ten commandments to regulate his conduct." Pray what can be so obnoxious to a believer in those ten words? Should he not adhere to one God? abstain from idols? revere.

vere the divine name? obey parents? abstain from murder; adultery; stealing; false witnessing; and covetousness? Are these inconsistent with the law of the Spirit of life? I omit here the fourth commandment; not because I do not believe it a rule of conduct to a believer, but as I will not here enter upon the debate about the Jewish and Christian sabbath. I remember his quibble; if it will help his proof, let him make the best of it. The position, that Christ hath abolished the law, as a rule of conduct, is pregnant with absurdities, profanity, &c.

His objections in page 21. are not in our Letter, so we may let them pass on to others who may frame them. Yet a few remarks may be made upon his answers. P. 22. he says, "I must suppose that those who are so fond of the law, never heard the voice of the law speaking in their conscience." And what if I were to suppose, that those who are not fond of the law as a rule, never heard aright, either the voice of the law as wounding, or of the gospel as healing? But the truth is, where the curse of the law is removed by the blood of Christ, there is nothing terrifying in the law. It is love to God, and love to man. If Mr. B. were more fond of it in that view, it would be more to his credit as a Christian minister. The apostle says, "His commandments are not grievous:" Yet they seem very grievous to some. But after all this, Mr. B. says, p. 23. "There is not a commandment in the law, which is not more clearly expressed in the precepts of the gospel;" and p. 24. "The believer has the law written in the fleshly table of his heart." Pray let it be taken in this sense, then the great outcry against our Letter is quite needless.— Does not our Letter sufficiently acknowledge that
"the

“ the covenant of works, as to a believer, exists
 “ no more under the form of a law ?” Where then
 is the propriety of repeating that so often, p. 25.
 and elsewhere, unless it be to throw dust in the
 eyes of the unwary reader ? It is evident we plead
 not for the law as a *covenant*, but as a *rule*.

How impertinent and inconclusive the talk in
 page 27 ! Does he not know, that our Letter
 speaks of the law of creation ? Was not that, in
 the hand of the Spirit, to regulate the conduct of
 the elders, many more than 430 years before the
 legislation on Sinai ? Does he not assert, p. 15.
 that the law given upon Sinai was in substance
 the same as that given to Adam ? that in the ten
 commandments nothing was “ superadded to the
 “ law given to Adam : and that what was a sin
 “ after the law upon Sinai, was a sin before that
 “ law was given ?” Did the finger of Jehovah,
 writing upon that mountain, render the law so
 obnoxious to us, when the curse is taken away ?
 In the connection the words there stand, I think
 it little better than profane to say, “ The Spirit
 “ surely is a sufficient guide without any other
 “ direction or assistance.” As if the Holy Spirit
 did not guide by his own word ; all scripture being
 given by divine inspiration, and the moral law in
 our Letter containing every thing of a preceptive
 nature through the Bible.

All that Mr. B. says, p. 28. is beside his subject.
 It is very well, to acknowledge that “ religion
 “ obliges to morality ;” and that there may be
 morality without true religion ; but that the latter
 can never be where the former is wanting. This is
 a good confession ; though it may be difficult even
 for Mr. B. to reconcile it with what he saith in
 p. 31. where Abraham and Rahab are said to be
 justified

justified by their acts of faith, while their conduct was contrary to the moral law.

That true faith is the gift of God, as noted in p. 30. we ever maintain: but we absolutely deny the position in p. 31. which runs thus; "The work of which St. James speaks, can mean nothing else, but the work or act of faith." We further maintain, that true faith will ever lead the subject of it to take the word of God for the rule of his conduct.

To maintain that the preceptive part of holy scripture should regulate the believer's conduct, is no attempt "to set up man's personal righteousness to the effectual exclusion of the righteousness of Christ," as p. 33. untruly insinuates. Let any impartial reader judge, whether our Letter be chargeable with making such an attempt. To come to rest and peace by any evidence, without obedience to the word of God, and sanctification, is fatal presumption. The Holy Spirit doth never evidence the justification of an unholy, disobedient despiser of the moral law.—Persons ought to look into themselves for a new heart, true faith, &c. and be taught to do so. Having these, they unavoidably look unto Christ preached to them, as directed in the gospel: but being destitute of these, they do not look to Christ savingly nor evangelically, whatever their delusions may be.—In the very next paragraph, Mr. B. says, p. 33. "That there is a desire and disposition in the mind of every true believer, arising from a sense of God's love, and maintained by his Spirit, to live in conformity to the divine will, and continually to enjoy communion with God, is ever to be insisted upon, as the effect of faith." Then, are not persons to look into themselves for

for that "desire and disposition?" And how are they to know the "divine will," but by the preceptive part of the scripture? The law, considered merely as a rule of conduct, has no curses.

To conclude: The best construction I can put upon Mr. B.'s performance is, that he read our Letter very superficially, and did not take much care to understand it. If he perverted it as he did, designedly, it was very base indeed. But that we must now leave. To his own Master he standeth or falleth.

*Leominster,
September 10th, 1788.*

THE END.

1 AU 59

1944

